

DESCHUTES
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SHERIFF'S
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WC Docket No 12-375, FCC 12-167

Federal Communications Commission: Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling
Services Comment on Proposed Rule Making

The Deschutes County Sheriff's Office supports the principle that phone rates for inmate telephone calls should be reasonable. We know that inmates do better – both while incarcerated and once released – when they can remain in contact with their friends and family members, and, hence, we recognize the importance of inmates' communications with the outside. Increased phone rates do help us reach our goal of promoting inmate communications.

At the same time, we assert that prison telephone service is not the same as service offered in the community. Any rule passed to regulate phone call costs must take into consideration the unique nature of corrections and the important need to balance security needs and family contact. The cost structure currently in place in Deschutes County strikes that balance. The proposed \$0.07 per minute cap would drastically impair our ability to keep that balance in place. If such an unreasonable rate cap were imposed it would be detrimental to the security of our facilities and to the lives of our inmates.

The technology that our current inmate telecommunication provider offers has been a tremendous asset to the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office and to many other law-enforcement agencies. One of the great advantages of our current inmate communication system ("ICS") is the ability to monitor and record all calls going into or out of the jail. Subsequently, all of those calls can be quickly and easily shared. Other law enforcement agencies with whom we partner rely heavily upon the technology. As a result, we have been able to drastically improve our ability to increase the security of the facility and to public safety outside of it.

To demonstrate how the facility, outside agencies, and the public, have benefitted from the technology offered by our inmate communication system, we highlight the following.

- The recording of all calls and the voice verification that must be completed prior to each has reduced the amount of witness tampering and violations of no-contact orders. When such threatening calls have been placed, the offenders are much more easily prosecuted.
- By monitoring and reviewing phone calls, jail staff recently prevented a suicide attempt. This feature enhances our ability to assist our most at-risk inmates.
- The ICS has a toll-free PREA hotline. This has been very helpful in tracking and documenting PREA claims, as mandated by Federal law.

Because of the significant public safety benefits the technology our ICS offers, we are extremely concerned about the proposed rate ceiling. Our view is that it will be terribly detrimental. We will no longer be able to pay for the system we currently have, or, at the very least, we will not have access to all of the features that have proven so helpful in preventing and prosecuting crime.

Of primary concern to the Sheriff's Office about the proposed rate cap is that no provider of inmate telecommunication services could offer the types of technological advances and free services that have been so effective in the prevention and prosecution of crimes. Without the technologies to which we have grown accustomed, everyone involved with our detention facilities will suffer in some way. The only ones to benefit are those people involved in criminal activity, as preventing and prosecuting their crimes will become much more difficult.

We also oppose the proposed elimination of commissions to prisons. It is almost a truism that county jails are struggling with budgetary constraints. Ours is no exception. These commissions are extremely important to us, primarily because they are used to pay for programs designed for the inmates' benefits. These programs improve the inmates' parenting skills, life-skills, anger management, and earn their GED. Other programs help inmates deal with their drug or alcohol addictions. These programs are not free. We must pay for materials as well as for instructors to lead the classes. Presently, we are able to offer these programs because of the commissions received from the ICS.

Because of the commissions we receive, the cost associated with running these important programs is off-set. Eliminating our ability to receive a commission from the inmate telecommunication system would necessarily be detrimental to the County and its residents. Indeed such a reduction in our revenues would almost certainly lead to a corresponding reduction in the programs offered to the inmates.

We would urge the Commission to not impose a rate cap on, nor eliminate our ability to receive commissions from the inmate communication system. Doing so would impair our ability to provide a secure environment within the facility, reduce public safety, and impair our county's finances.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Espinoza", written in a cursive style.

Captain Michael Espinoza

Deschutes County Sheriff's Office

SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY